







A

PLEA FOR TOLERATION BY LAW,

IN CERTAIN

RITUAL MATTERS;

WITH REFERENCE TO THE

PUBLIC WORSHIP REGULATION
BILL.

By the BISHOP of LINCOLN.

LINCOLN: JAMES WILLIAMSON.
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A conversation arose on Wednesday last, in the Upper House of the Convocation of Canterbury, on the presentation of a Petition from some distinguished Laymen, praying that sufficient time might be given to the Clergy for the consideration of the "Public Worship Regulation Bill," now before Parliament ; and I now wish to state somewhat more fully what was briefly expressed by me on that occasion.

It is agreed on all sides that the constitution and modes of procedure of our Ecclesiastical Courts require amendment. It is also a general opinion, that a remedy is urgently needed for evils and abuses prevailing in some of our Churches, in the ritual of divine service, whether by excess or defect.

The "Public Worship Regulation Bill" is based on these two acknowledged facts.

We need not now enquire, whether measures are not equally required for the correction of Ecclesiastics, whether Bishops or Clergy, who may offend by unsoundness of doctrine or viciousness of life ; and whether such offences might not be dealt with in the same legislative enactment as that which concerns the Public Worship of the Church.

The question now submitted for consideration is—

Whether the "Public Worship Regulation Bill" does not require the complement of certain co-ordinate provisions, in order to render it a safe and salutary enactment at the present time.

The Bill is of a stringent, coercive, and penal character. Under its operation a Bishop might find himself to be divested of his character and influence as a spiritual Father and be constrained as a Judge, sitting with Assessors in his

Consistory Court, to enforce on the Clergy of his Diocese a rigid uniformity under severe penalties, in certain ritual matters which have hitherto been regarded by many as doubtful, but which may hereafter be decided in one exclusive sense by Ecclesiastical Courts.

There seem to be two important principles to be kept steadily in view at the present juncture.

On the one side it is the duty of a Church not to surrender its power of Toleration, in things of questionable obligation, especially in a free age and country like ours, and at a time when private judgment, and even individual waywardness, have been allowed to manifest themselves in varieties and extravagances unknown for two centuries. Remedies good in themselves may become relatively bad, by reason of the state of the patient to whom they are applied.

We need the higher and nobler functions of Charity and Equity to temper the rigour of Law, and to prevent Law from degenerating into injustice.

On the other hand, while a large measure of Liberty is conceded, care is to be taken that it may not be abused by individuals into an occasion of unbridled Licentiousness.

The result of these two propositions is, that the measure of Liberty ought to be determined by Law.

In other words, it ought not to be left to individual Clergymen to choose by an eclectic process what rites and ceremonies they please, from ancient, mediæval, or modern Churches, and to import them into their own Churches, and to impose them on their own congregations; which would lead to endless confusion; but the Church of England, exercising that authority which belongs to all national churches, ought to define and declare publicly by her synodical judgments, what things in her services are to be regarded as obligatory, and what may be considered as indifferent.

And she ought, as an Established Church, to seek for legal sanction from the Crown and from Parliament, for these her authoritative definitions and declarations.

These were the principles on which our Book of Common Prayer was framed and revised.

To illustrate this by examples.

The *Eastward* position of the Celebrant at the prayer of Consecration in the Holy Communion has been condemned and prohibited by the Court of Final Appeal. And the position at the *north end* has been declared to be the legal one.

If this question were to be argued again, this judgment would probably be re-affirmed.

My reasons for this opinion are as follows :—

The Church of England in her rubric at the beginning of her Office for the Holy Communion, recognizes *two* positions of the Communion Table as equally lawful. The Table may stand “in the body of the Church.” This is the first position which it specifies. And in this case it would stand long-wise, *i.e.*, parallel to the north and south walls of the Church.

This was the position of the Table in most Parish Churches during the seventeenth century, and at the last review ; as appears from the Seventh Canon of the Convocation of 1640, Archbishop Laud’s Convocation.

In this case it is certain that the Celebrant did not occupy an *eastward* position, but stood on the north side of the Table with his face to the South.

The second lawful position of the Holy Table was “in the Chancel,” at the East End ; and there it stood cross-wise, *i.e.*, from north to south.

This was its position “in most Cathedral Churches, and in some Parochial Churches,” as the same Canon declares ; and has now become general.

That in Cathedrals the Celebrant stood at the north end (called the *north side* in the rubric, which is purposely framed so as to suit both positions of the Table) is clear from the testimony of the continued and uniform usage of all Cathedral Churches to the present times. In the case of a very few Cathedrals the Eastward position has been introduced within the last ten years. But I am speaking of the practice up to the beginning of the present century.

The engraving which Laud's bitter enemy, William Prynne (who would gladly have convicted him of any practice regarded by Puritans as Papistical) published of the arrangement of the Archbishop's Private Chapel (London, 1644, p. 123) where the Cushion for the Celebrant (for a cushion there was) is placed at the *north end* of the Table, leads to the same conclusion.

This is further demonstrated by the well-known rubric of the Non-jurors (no favourers of Protestantism) in their Prayer Book, where the words, "*before the table*," are explained to mean "*the north side thereof*."

Being desirous of shewing dutiful obedience to the Laws of the Church of England, I have earnestly endeavoured to persuade the Clergy of the Diocese of Lincoln to consecrate the Holy Communion at the north side of the Table, so as to be able more readily, in compliance with the rubric, "*to break the bread before the people*."

But does it follow that a Bishop should desire to be armed with powers (such as are given him by the present Bill) to *enforce* this Law? And does it also follow, that he should wish to be compelled, on the complaint of a Parishioner (as contemplated in the Bill), to enforce it?

Nothing less: for by such a course he would probably drive from their cures some of the most zealous clergymen in his Diocese, and produce a Schism in the Church.

He would indeed be thankful for Uniformity, if he could have it, as well as Unity ; but if he cannot have both, he would not sacrifice Unity to Uniformity : this would be to prefer the letter to the spirit.

But would he wish to leave things as they are ?

No ; for at present (to specify the same example) a clergyman who consecrates in the northern position is prone to condemn a brother who holds to the eastern position, as doing what is illegal ; and thus strifes are engendered, destroying the peace and efficiency of the Church.

Where, then, is the solution ?

Let either position of the Celebrant *be declared by authority to be lawful* ; in other words, let the position be *pronounced by law to be indifferent*. The position of the Holy Table itself is already declared by Law to be indifferent. It may be in the chancel, and it may be in the body of the Church.

Why not also the position of the Celebrant at the Holy Table ?

As a matter of fact, this solution has already been applied in the sister Church of America. That Church glories in the name of Protestant. It styles itself "the Protestant Episcopal Church." But it recognizes the eastward and northern position as equally lawful ; indeed, in some dioceses, another position,—which is commended by its high antiquity, namely on the east side of the Holy Table, with the face of the Celebrant looking westward, is also permitted.

Why should not we do the same in the Church of England ?

Each of those two former positions of the Celebrant has its own special significance. The one represents the divine grace and gift to man. The other expresses man's plea for mercy and acceptance with God. The one looks manward

from God ; the other looks Godward from man. The one position exhibits the benefits of communion with Christ. The other commemorates—and pleads the merits of—His one Sacrifice for Sin. It might be well that the Church, by permitting and authorizing both those positions, should set before her people this double aspect and meaning of that blessed Sacrament, and thus, even by relaxing the strictness of ritual uniformity, preserve and represent unity and completeness of doctrine concerning those holy mysteries.

The third position of the Celebrant, which is perhaps the most ancient of all (that at the east side of the Holy Table with his face looking westward to the people) might also safely and rightly be permitted.

We should derive benefit from this variety. We should have a fuller view of the manifold significance of the Holy Eucharist, from these three positions, just as we have a clearer view of the Gospel from having four Gospels, than if we had only one Gospel.

The Church of Rome authorizes two positions, the one looking Eastward, the other Westward ; so that the Eastward position ought not to be considered as distinctively Roman. It is also sanctioned by Lutheran Churches as well as in the American Church.

I have said that, in my opinion, the Purchas Judgment, condemning the Eastward position of the Celebrant, would probably be re-affirmed.

I am not so sure that this would be the case with that part of the judgment, which, while it prescribes the use of the Cope by the Celebrant in Cathedrals on great festivals, condemns the use of a distinctive Eucharistic dress by the Celebrant in Parish Churches. I am rather disposed to think that the use of such a vestment might hereafter be pronounced to be obligatory.

If this should happen to be the case,—and to say the least it is probable,—what would be the predicament of a Bishop, if “the Public Worship Regulation Bill,” now before Parliament, became law?

He would be obliged to enforce the northern position on the Celebrant, and also to require him to wear a distinctive Eucharistic vestment.

Would this be acceptable to either of the two great parties in the Church?

Might it not produce a double rupture in his Diocese?

Where, therefore, again let us ask, is the solution?

Let us no longer waste our energies on vexatious and ruinous litigation (we have lately been told in Parliament that two lawsuits cost as much as would have built and endowed a Parish Church); but let the national Church of England declare by her Synodical authority that a simple distinctive dress for the Celebrant at the Holy Eucharist is *permissible*, but not to be enforced upon any.

This also has already been done in some dioceses of America.

It has, indeed, been objected, that the solution is more easy in America than in England, because the constitution of the American Church is congregational rather than parochial, and that nothing can there be introduced into the Services of the Church on the mere motion of an individual Minister, against the wish of the Congregation.

But it may be replied, that in our great towns the congregational system, as distinct from the parochial, prevails as much as in America; and that in rural districts in America the system is parochial.

In that country there is a double safeguard against extravagances; first the consent, duly ascertained and expressed, of the communicants of the congregation or

parish ; and next, the sanction of the Ordinary. Both these guarantees against innovations and excesses may be obtained in the Church of England, as well as in that of America.

A few years ago the adoption of the surplice in the pulpit in some parish churches produced a commotion. And why ? Because it was an innovation introduced by individual clergymen, and because the people were naturally uneasy and suspicious from the apprehension that other innovations might follow in rapid succession without limitation. But now that the surplice has been declared by authority to be a lawful vestment, the objections have passed away.

Also, as soon as the Cope was pronounced by the final Court of Appeal to be the lawful vestment of the Celebrant at certain times and places, no exception was taken to its use. But, I suppose, we should not wish it to be enforced in all our Cathedrals under penalties by Law ; as it may be, if the present Bill should pass.

Again, at the present time, a Bishop may, at his discretion, require two full Services on a Sunday in any Church in his Diocese ; and he is generally presumed to have a discretionary power of enforcing daily service, and the observance of Saints' Days and Holy Days, and the administration of the Sacrament of Baptism after the Second Lesson, and public Catechizing.

But if the present Bill were to become Law, it would seem that any Incumbent, "who failed to observe the directions in the Book of Common Prayer relating" to these and other things (I quote the words of the Bill,) might be subject to severe penalties, and even to suspension.

I have no wish that such things as these should be declared indifferent ; but I refer to them as shewing that

there is, and must be, some discretionary power lodged somewhere ; and it will be difficult to say where it can be vested, if not in the Ordinary.

But there are one or two other ritual matters (and I do not think that there need be more) which might, I conceive, be declared by law to be indifferent ; and if this course were pursued, then the danger of a Schism, which might be incurred, if the present Bill passes without any moderating and qualifying provisions, would be averted ; and the Bill itself might be made acceptable to the great body of the faithful and loyal Clergy and Laity of the Church of England.

In adopting such a course we should be treading in the steps of our own Reformers, and of those who revised the Prayer Book at the Restoration.

The *doctrine* contained in the Prayer Book is unalterable, because it is the Faith revealed in Holy Scripture, and received by the Primitive Church.

But the Reformers altered the Ritual of the Church no less than three times in the course of twenty years ; and in the Preface which was prefixed to that Book at the last review, about 200 years ago, and which is due to one of the most judicious of English Prelates, Bishop Sanderson, it is affirmed that “it hath been the wisdom of the Church of England ever since the first compiling of her public Liturgy, to keep the mean between the two extremes, of too much stiffness in refusing, and of too much laxness in admitting, any variation from it”—and it “is but reasonable, that upon weighty and important considerations, according to the various exigency of times and occasions, *such changes and alterations* should be made therein, as to those that are *in place of Authority* should from time to time seem either necessary or expedient.”

It may therefore be presumed, that our Reformers and our Revisers of the Book of Common Prayer would, as wise, learned, pious, and charitable men, contemplating the altered circumstances of the times, and the condition of the Church in these days, be the first to relax some of the stringent laws of our ritual, and to pronounce certain things to be indifferent by law, in order that they might promote those high and holy purposes of faith, worship, and morals, for which the Prayer Book was framed, and which are paramount to all rites and ceremonies of human institution.

Let me here submit another suggestion. At former epochs in our Church-history, when alterations in our Liturgy were contemplated, leading persons on different sides were summoned to a friendly Conference. Such was the Hampton Court Conference, at the beginning of the reign of James the First, and the Savoy Conference at the Restoration. Much benefit was thus derived from a free interchange of opinion. A Conference at the present time, of those eminent men in our Church, of opposite parties, who have been too much estranged from one another, would probably lead to mutual concessions ; and a result might be obtained, which, without enforcing obnoxious practices on either, as things necessary to be observed, might lead to a liberal Toleration, limited by Law, of things permitted to be done under certain conditions, and thus Liberty might be secured, without degenerating into Licentiousness.

The Report of the Lower House of Convocation, of June 5, 1866, and the Reports of the Royal Commission on Ritual, might supply means and materials for this peaceful adjustment.

If such a course, as has now been traced out, were followed, there is reason to believe, that, under God's good Providence,

our strifes would be appeased, and Law and Order be restored, and the Church would be free to devote her energies to the performance of her divinely appointed work, that of waging war against ignorance and sin, and of diffusing the Gospel of Christ at home and abroad, and of promoting God's Glory, and the temporal and eternal welfare of mankind.

C. LINCOLN.

Riseholme, Lincoln,

May 4, 1874.



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